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Date: October 11, 2011

To: Representative Foster, Chairperson, House Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation
House Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee

From: Rebecca Park, State Governmental Affairs

Re: Testimony on SB 248 (S-2)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment in support of SB 248 (S-2). As reported from the Senate, the bill would accomplish many things, but one main objective is to place a soft cap on the amount of acres the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) can acquire.

Farm Bureau policy, as developed by our farmer members, recommends the State sell some of its land to meet its obligations and return the land to private ownership and property tax rolls for local communities. Farm Bureau supported legislation sponsored by Rep. Foster passed earlier this year to address the issue of not fully meeting financial obligations of PILT (payment in lieu of taxes). This was certainly a step in the right direction but there is still the issue of management. Likewise, the DNR does reevaluate land holdings and has made a concentrated effort to minimize pieces of land that cannot be managed effectively. With all that said, the question must still be asked; does the State have the appropriate resources, manpower, or finances, to effectively manage all of the land under our ownership?

Perhaps there are better ways to prioritize land holdings or a process to be developed for special situations where the State feels it must be the owner of a certain parcel. A land cap doesn't necessarily harm either of these tactics. It would seem the bill at hand would cause the DNR to more thoroughly evaluate their landholdings and provide more intensive oversight and management of the land that is under their control. Michigan has more State owned land than any state east of the Mississippi and while Farm Bureau supports the DNR we also believe a balance should be had when it comes to land ownership.

Thank you for your time and considering this important piece of legislation.